

Almanac

CONGRESSIONAL

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Louisiana

Governor: John Bel Edwards (D)

Senators: Bill Cassidy (R), John Kennedy (R)

Representatives: 1 Democrats , 5 Republicans

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Demographics

Population 2015^{**}: 4,625,253

Square Miles: 43,204

Population per Square Mile: 107.1

Population Born in State: 78.0%

With Health Insurance Coverage: 84.5%

Military Veteran: 8.1%

Active Military: 0.4%

Receives Cash Public Assistance Income: 1.5%

Receives Food Stamp/SNAP Benefits: 16.3%

Household Median Income: \$45,047 (44 out of 50)

Poverty Rate: 19.8%

Economics

Profile

In the decade between 2000 and 2010, Louisiana – ravaged repeatedly by hurricanes – was third to last of any state in population growth. But since 2010, Louisiana's population has increased by 3 percent, and by a striking 13 percent in Orleans Parish, home to Louisiana's singular, and singularly resilient, urban gem, New Orleans. The comeback hasn't been perfect, but at least it's a comeback.

Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "There is on the globe one single spot, the possessor of which is our natural and habitual enemy. It is New Orleans, through which the produce of three-eighths of our territory must pass to market." He was writing as Americans were streaming through the narrow gaps of the Appalachian chain, settling land drained by the fast-flowing Ohio and Mississippi rivers. In 1718, the French founded New Orleans on a ridge formed by deposits of silt and declared the Mississippi Valley the colony of Louisiana. It was transferred to Spain in 1763, and after France took possession again, Jefferson sought to buy the city in 1802. When Napoleon offered to sell the entire Louisiana Territory, Jefferson's envoys quickly and eagerly agreed to purchase it-almost doubling the land area of the young republic. Its large French and small Spanish population had been ruled under European civil law rather than English common law. When Louisiana was admitted as a state in 1812, it included territory well to the north of the city that would soon be overrun by Americans heading west. The state's boundaries were rounded out with the acquisition of West Florida, the land north of Lake Pontchartrain heading west to Baton Rouge. With its large sugar and cotton slave plantations, Louisiana boomed, and by the outbreak of the Civil War, New Orleans was the nation's sixth largest city-the only substantial city in the Confederate South.

Louisiana has remained distinctive and exotic ever since. It is divided between a Catholic Cajun south, a Baptist Protestant north, and idiosyncratic New Orleans. Its population is 33 percent black, the second-highest percentage of any state; it was black Louisianans who developed American jazz. (It is five percent Hispanic and two percent Asian.) The state's economy has always been based on the export of raw materials-sugar, rice, and cotton in the 19th century; oil and gas in the 20th and 21st centuries. Its most talented politician was Huey Long, who as a young Public Service Commission chairman championed a severance tax on oil, and who, in less than a single term each as governor (1928-32) and as a senator (1932-35), left an imprint on the state's public life and imposed an organization on its politics that faded into history only a generation ago. Long's genius was not that he promised to tax the rich to help the poor-hundreds of idealists and demagogues in America have done that-but that to an amazing extent he delivered. He dominated the legislature so thoroughly that, as governor, he roamed the floors of both chambers at will, bringing to the podium bills he insisted lawmakers pass without changing a comma-and they did. He was ready to use bribery, intimidation and physical violence. He built a new skyscraper Capitol, a new Louisiana State University, a Mississippi River bridge in New Orleans, and more miles of roads than any other state but rich New York and huge Texas. He also built a national following and, by 1935, was planning to run for president on a platform of "Share the wealth, every man a king." That year, Long was assassinated at age 42 in the hallway of the Capitol he built. The bullet holes can still be seen in the marble walls.

Long's impact was lasting, and not just in the literary character he inspired-Willie Stark of Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*. The Long threat may have moved President Franklin D. Roosevelt to embrace the liberal programs-the Wagner Labor Act, Social Security, and steeply graduated taxes-of the Second New Deal. For Louisiana, Long delivered a political structure that revolved around him even after he was dead-and a class of political leaders who, lacking his talents, treated the state as Long's incompetent doctors had treated his fatal wound, leaving Louisiana with neither a fully developed economy nor a fully competent public sector. For 50 years, until Huey's son, Sen. Russell Long, retired in 1986, Longs and Long protégés held high political office in Louisiana and elections were run along pro- and anti-Long lines. The Long experience strengthened Louisiana's already strong predispositions-tolerance of corruption, disinterest in abstract reform, and a taste for colorful extremists regardless of their short-term means or long-term ends. This has persisted: In 2015, the website *FiveThirtyEight* tallied the number of public officials with federal corruption convictions in each state. On a per capita basis, Louisiana ranked first.

This has not helped to create a vibrant economy. Louisiana has chronically suffered low incomes, low workforce participation, and low levels of education, with income disparities greater than almost anywhere else in the United States. Louisiana has the nation's highest incarceration rate, the second-biggest gender pay gap in the nation and the fourth-lowest share of female legislators. Its median income is 19 percent below the national average, and its obesity rate – the highest in the nation – has grown from 22.6 percent in 2000 to 36.2 percent in 2015. New Orleans' elite class has been notoriously tight-knit, not venturesome. Louisiana momentarily prospered when oil prices spiked upwards in 1973 and 1979, but then jobs and people flowed out in the 1980s as it failed to develop a diverse economy similar to that of its similarly oil-rich neighbor, Texas. This has made a huge difference over time. Metro New Orleans in 1940 had a population of 564,000; it was about the same size then as metro Houston (610,000) and metro Dallas (624,000). But in 2004, just before Hurricane Katrina struck, metro Houston had 5.1 million people, metro Dallas 5.8 million, and New Orleans just 1.3 million.

Hurricane Katrina, the third deadliest in U.S. history and by far the costliest on record, slammed the Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005, and for several weeks, New Orleans and Louisiana dominated the national spotlight. More than 80 percent of the city was flooded, and hundreds of thousands of residents abandoned their homes for higher ground. All told, Katrina was responsible for some 1,800 deaths and at least \$108 billion in property damage. New Orleans mostly withstood the initial winds and storm surge. But then the levees broke, submerging much of the city under water. The 17th Street Canal sprang a 200-foot gash through which much of the water flowed. Levees along the Industrial Canal, in the poverty-stricken 9th Ward, likewise failed to hold back water driven by a wave surge that reached over 20 feet. The Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, built by the Army Corps of Engineers as a shipping channel (though precious few ships ever used it), funneled waters and winds into St. Bernard Parish east of the city and the lowlands of New Orleans, devastating all in its wake. More than half of the 270 miles of federally constructed levees and flood walls in Louisiana were breached or heavily damaged by winds and flood waters. Katrina (with another powerful storm, Rita, less than a month later) also laid bare the state's political and economic frailties. Gov. Kathleen Blanco and Mayor Ray Nagin (who was convicted of bribery charges in 2014) seemed incapable of coping with the disaster.

By July 2006, Louisiana's population declined by 250,000 (mostly in the New Orleans area), although many people eventually returned, as did tourists. In April 2010, disaster struck Louisiana again when BP's Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded, killing 11 workers and spewing an estimated 4 million barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. The oil slick that spread from the drilling

site southeast of the mouth of the Mississippi River to the Mississippi River Delta threatened the state's oyster beds and shrimp fisheries. Volunteers streamed in to tend oil-stained pelicans and herons, while repeated attempts to plug the leak failed until one approach was finally successful in early August; five years later, an estimated 20 species continued to struggle. The federal government imposed a six-month moratorium on offshore drilling, a serious economic setback for the state. In the first five years after the spill, BP spent \$27 billion on the recovery, economic claims and fines. But offshore drilling, in operation since 1947, has long been a major part of Louisiana's economy and an estimated 20 percent of the state's jobs depend on it in some form. The resumption of offshore drilling in 2011 and the increasing use of fracking-the extraction of natural gas by hydraulic fracturing-in the Haynesville shale in northwest Louisiana touched off a recovery, with billion-dollar investments in refineries, gas-to-liquid facilities, and liquefied natural gas export terminals. Today, petroleum is the state's biggest industry, ahead of agriculture, chemicals, and processed foods. Unemployment in Louisiana followed an unusual track peaking at only 8.3 percent in the fall of 2010, but since then improving more slowly than the national average. By late 2016, it was a point and a half above the national average.

Another disaster, a catastrophic flood, struck the Baton Rouge area in August 2016, with as much as 31 inches of rain in 15 hours; the American Red Cross said it ranked as the nation's worst natural disaster since Hurricane Sandy in 2012. The environment is almost certain to be a long-term problem for the state. Low-lying Louisiana is uniquely at risk from rising sea levels. Brett Anderson of the New Orleans Times-Picayune has written that if maps of the state rendered wetlands as water and counted only solid "walkable" ground as land, then the very shape of Louisiana-its iconic "boot"-would appear "as if it came out on the wrong side of a battle with a lawnmower's blades."

For more than a century after the Civil War, Louisiana was solidly Democratic, with political divides expressed in Democratic primaries. There were splits between the Cajun Catholic parishes, which cast about 30 percent of the state's votes, and Protestant parishes north of Baton Rouge, which cast about 45 percent. Another division was by income. Low-income voters of both races tended to support Huey Long and his populist successors; higher-income voters often opposed them. So for a long time, Louisiana politics were a struggle between reformist and conservative forces on one side and roguish populists on the other, a struggle waged in lavishly financed campaigns with grandiloquent rhetoric. For more than two decades the lead role in state politics was played by Edwin Edwards, a colorful Cajun populist who was elected governor in 1972 and 1975, sat out 1979 because he was ineligible to run, and then in 1983 won a third term. While in office, he faced corruption charges and was acquitted by a jury in 1986. He lost a bid for reelection in 1987 but ran again in 1991. In Louisiana's all-party system, he won 34 percent of the vote to 32 percent for David Duke, a white supremacist who had won a special election to the legislature as a Republican in 1989. Duke was repudiated by Republican National Committee Chairman Lee Atwater, President George H.W. Bush, and most Louisiana Republicans. Bumper stickers read, "Vote for the crook-it's important," and a majority of voters listened; Edwards won the runoff, 61%-39%. He was convicted on corruption charges in May 2000 and went to prison.

In the years since, Louisiana has become ever more Republican. It voted for Bill Clinton in 1992 and 1996 (the only deep-South state to do so), but has voted solidly Republican ever since. Democratic Sen. Mary Landrieu was elected to three terms starting in 1996, but never with more than 52 percent of the vote, and in 2014, she lost her seat to Republican Bill Cassidy. Republican Sen. David Vitter was elected in 2004 with 51 percent under Louisiana's system of multiparty primaries, and despite scandal in his personal life, was reelected 57%-38% in 2010. Republican Bobby Jindal, defeated for governor 52%-48% by Democrat Blanco in 2003, came back in 2007 and won the multiparty primary with 54% of the vote. The congressional delegation now has five Republicans and one Democrat; the legislature, Democratic since Reconstruction, changed hands as party switchers brought about Republican majorities in the state House in 2010 and the state Senate in 2011.

Jindal, a political wunderkind, came into the governorship as a policy wonk, but he governed more as ideologue than pragmatist. In 2008, he signed a law that, he acknowledged, allows teachers to "teach our kids about creationism." His administration stiffened Louisiana's regulations on abortion clinics, and he clashed with his own state schools superintendent, John White, over the fate of the Common Core school standards. Louisiana, with Jindal's support, had adopted Common Core in 2010, but amid rising national Republican opposition, Jindal became one of his party's most outspoken opponents. Most urgently, Louisiana on his watch was hammered by lower oil prices, which, combined with past tax cuts, meant that Jindal left office with a \$943 million budget deficit for his final fiscal year and a projected \$2 billion shortfall for 2016-2017. His approval ratings sank to the high 20s -- below even Obama's in the state -- and he dropped out of the presidential race several weeks before the Iowa Caucuses. Perhaps most surprising of all, Jindal's rocky tenure enabled a relatively obscure Democrat, West Point graduate John Bel Edwards, to succeed him. Edwards defeated Vitter, the sitting senator, for the governorship by a 56%-44% margin, amid fatigue over Jindal and a re-litigation of Vitter's past scandals. In office, Edwards signed up roughly 400,000 people for Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, something Jindal had steadfastly refused to do.

In 2016, Donald Trump expanded upon Mitt Romney's 2012 victory in the state, widening the GOP margin from 18 points to 20, thanks to strong backing in rural areas. Trump won about 26,000 more votes than Romney, while Hillary Clinton won 29,000 fewer votes than Obama four years earlier. The Democrats won the same 10 parishes as they did in 2012. Clinton fared about 7,000 votes better in 69% minority Orleans Parish, while neighboring, 41% minority Jefferson Parish voted for Trump by 14 points, down from 18 in 2012. Clinton fared about 8,000 votes better in 69% minority Orleans Parish, while neighboring 41% minority Jefferson Parish voted for Trump by 15 points, down from 18 in 2012. The two other highest-population parishes, East Baton Rouge and Caddo (Shreveport) went for Clinton by similar margins as they had for Obama in 2012. The other notable electoral result from 2016: Duke, the white supremacist, garnered only 3 percent of the primary vote for Vitter's open Senate seat, nowhere near enough to make the runoff.

Presidential Politics

2016 PRESIDENTIAL VOTE

Donald Trump (R)	Votes: 1,178,638	Percent: 58%
Hillary Clinton (D)	Votes: 780,154	Percent: 38%

2016 DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY

Hillary Clinton (D)	Votes: 221,733	Percent: 71%
Bernie Sanders (D)	Votes: 72,276	Percent: 23%

2016 REPUBLICAN PRIMARY

Donald Trump (R)	Votes: 124,854	Percent: 41%
Ted Cruz (R)	Votes: 113,968	Percent: 38%
Marco Rubio (R)	Votes: 33,813	Percent: 11%
John Kasich (R)	Votes: 19,359	Percent: 6%

2012 PRESIDENTIAL VOTE

Mitt Romney (R)	Votes: 1,152,262	Percent: 58%
Barack Obama (D)	Votes: 809,141	Percent: 41%

Not many general election presidential campaign ads are going to be taped in Cajun any time soon. Louisiana voted for the Republican nominees by 57 percent, 59 percent, 58 percent and 58 percent in the past four presidential races. The vote in Donald Trump's victory over Hillary Clinton, who received 38 percent, was remarkably similar to the regional results in the state four years earlier when President Barack Obama defeated Mitt Romney: Clinton and Obama both won Orleans Parish with about 80 percent; the Democratic and Republican tickets were essentially tied in the Baton Rouge area, and the Republican nominee won the rest of the state with more than 62 percent of the vote.

Louisiana has rarely played a significant role in presidential primaries and caucuses, with one odd exception. That was 1996, when GOP allies of candidate Phil Gramm of Texas set up a pre-Iowa caucus in Louisiana on Feb. 6. The aim was to jump-start Gramm's campaign. Instead, the caucuses killed it. Only 65,000 Republicans showed up at 42 voting sites (compared with almost 100,000 at 2,000 sites later in Iowa), and conservative commentator Pat Buchanan won more votes than Gramm and took 13 of the 21 delegates. Gramm's candidacy never recovered and he left the race after a dismal fifth-place showing in the Iowa caucuses. In 2016, Trump narrowly defeated Cruz 41%-38% on March 5, but the fighting continued after the ballots were cast: Cruz managed to wrangle an extra 10 delegates in the post-primary selection. After his campaign was outmaneuvered, Trump threatened a lawsuit but never followed through. In the Democratic primary, Clinton trounced Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, 71%-23%. She carried 62 of the state's 64 parishes. Like many states in the south, Clinton's overwhelming support from African Americans gave her an advantage in Louisiana, where a majority of the of registered Democrats are black.

Governor

Gov. John Bel Edwards (D)

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🏠N/A



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** Demographic and Economic figures are from the 2015 American Community Survey (ACS) one-year estimates reported by the U.S. Census Bureau.

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